

No. XV.—OCCURRENCE OF THE SHELDRAKE (*TADORNA TADORNA*) AND LAPWING (*VANELLUS VANELLUS*) IN UPPER BURMA

In an editorial comment in No. 1, vol. xxxi of this Journal (p. 224) it is mentioned that the Sheldrake *Tadorna tadorna* is an uncommon winter visitor to Northern India and 'is rare in Bengal but has been obtained as far east as Arakan'. It may be therefore of interest to record that on December 6, 1924 I saw some of these birds at Posagon near Paungbyin on the Upper Chindwin River. They were with a number of Ruddy Sheldrakes. On November 26, 1924, I saw on the same river south of Homalin, five Common Lapwings (*Vanellus vanellus*) which I have never before seen or heard of in Burma. They were on a jheel near Naungsankyin and were so close to me that it was quite unnecessary to identify them by shooting.

RANGOON,
July 16, 1926.

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No. XVI.—THE MATING OF CROWS

On April 26, 1925, I observed a pair of crows (*Corvus splendens splendens*) in copulation. It was at about six o'clock in the morning on an exposed telegraph post, with a number of other crows around. The act was performed in the usual manner of birds, and I am recording this as it is the first instance of the actual act having been witnessed by me.

Prior to this I had understood—and the belief is more or less general—that the squabbles commonly seen in the breeding season, when one crow is lying on his back on the ground seemingly pinioned, and grappling with another standing over him, was the method in which the act was accomplished. It is remarkable that there should be no records on this point, considering what an aggressively common bird the crow is, and in what profusion their nests are to be found at the beginning of the monsoon. Will any member who has made similar observations, enlighten me with his experience?

BOMBAY,
January 29, 1926.

SALIM A. ALI

No. XVII.—A NOTE ON THE NIDIFICATION OF THE WESTERN REEF EGRET (*LEPTERODIUS ASHA*) IN KARACHI CITY, SIND

(With a Plate)

I have closely observed the nidification of this species of Reef Egret in Karachi for four successive years.

For three years, season after season, the birds chose two definite sites, a straggling belt of trees bordering an old Burial Ground and a Public Garden, both situated in the heart of the native quarter of the City, about a mile away from salt water.

Both heronries were discovered early in May 1923. The site being given away by the throaty squakings of numberless fledglings clamouring for their never-ending meal of fish.

A score or so of very hard-set eggs, with which nothing could be done, were, on this occasion obtained.

During the two following years the birds again chose these sites and a large series of fresh and slightly incubated eggs was collected on March 22, 1924.

In 1926 the birds were obliged to abandon the burial ground site, which had been taken forcible possession of by large numbers of the common House Crow (*Corvus splendens*) attracted evidently by cattle tethered, for the first time, beneath the trees.

Pipal (*Ficus religiosa*) and Ber (*Zizyphus jujuba*); Portia (*Thespesia populnea*), Inga Dulcis (*Pithecolobium dulce*) and Jamblo (*Eugenia jambolana*) were the trees chosen by nesting birds, the first two being particularly favoured.

Nim (*Acadirachta indica*) trees were left severely alone for nesting sites, though some birds were noticed carrying small dried twigs off which the leaves had fallen.

Generally speaking birds paired off and commenced building during the first week in March. Courting preliminaries consisted of the male offering his mate

a freshly picked leaf or twig, which was accepted, played with and then allowed to fall to the ground. This performance would be repeated again and again, till the birds evidently tiring, would remain perched close to one another and at intervals preen themselves.

Early birds were content with building an ordinary, typically heron-like stick nest on the tree chosen by them, but numbers of birds building on *Pipal* after the appearance of new leaves, constructed a leafy and unique type of nest, photographs of which are appended.

Both types of nest vary in bulk and shape and consist of a fairly stable, platform-like structure of sticks lined with green leaves upon which three to four eggs are laid. The birds are of uncleanly habits and nests after a week's occupation have anything but a sanitary odour or appearance.

In the third week most birds were found sitting close on young or hard set eggs, and by the end of the fourth week numbers of fledglings were seen sitting loudly on the edges of their nests eagerly awaiting their diet of disgorged and evil smelling sprats.

Great excitement and a general uproar of throaty squaks, harsh quacks, hoarse gurglings and high pitched screams accompanied by a furious flapping of wings noisily heralded the arrival of every bird returning to the colony with a well-filled gullet of fish to appease the voracious appetite of its offspring.

On March 19, 1924, being unable to obtain a climber, I sat and observed a pair of slate-blue birds for the best part of an hour and the following is a polished extract of the note then made:—

'Most of the time was spent perched close together in idle contemplation. At intervals first one and then the other would preen itself. After about twenty minutes of this alternate dozing and preening, one lazily flapped its wings, stepped awkwardly about the branches, and after apparently choosing a suitable nesting site, crouched there with neck doubled in, till joined shortly after by its pair, which after inspecting the place and making several idle pecks at the twigs around, quietly crouched down, sitting cheek by jowl with its mate.

Thus they sat, at intervals either preening themselves, pecking lazily at their toes or surrounding twigs or quickly opening and shutting their bills, after the manner of storks when clicking their beaks.

Eventually they scrambled one after another to the topmost branches of the Ber tree where they once again perched in moody silence.'

When I left the heronry about an hour later, this couple was still seated as they had last been observed and some days later when I again visited the colony a bird was sitting close on a nest placed near the spot which the birds, under observation, had inspected on the 19th.

Though it cannot be positively stated that this bird was one of the pair formerly observed, still the presumption does arise and the grounds for its consideration are, at all events, reasonable.

During my visits to the heronries birds were often seen mating, the female passive, crouching low on the branch across which she sat, while the male completed the act with the usual flapping of wings.

I quote below a note made on March 19, 1924:—

'Visited the heronry where about two hundred birds were nesting amongst the topmost branches of lofty *Pipal* trees.'

A few nests however were placed in *Jamblo*, *Ber* and *Inga Dulcis* trees.

The majority of birds were slate, not more than a dozen pairs of the white variety being noticed. About half the colony was sitting close, the remainder busy building, nests being well advanced. Nests on *Pipal* were, in most cases, made from *Pipal* branches *with the leaves still on*. Freshly built nests had a most singular appearance, the green leaves forming a sort of curtain to the framework of the nest, which was in most cases completely hidden from view. As the branches aged and decayed, the leaves withered and gradually fell off exposing the stick structure of the nests.

Birds were observed in the act of building and carrying small branches of *Pipal* bearing leaves. In all cases the male, presumably, collected the building material and carried it to the female who either rejected or accepted it. She would remain perched on the chosen site while he flew off and deliberately broke, at times after considerable labour, a small green *Pipal* branch with which he flew to within a few feet of her. Two, three or more ungainly hops and flaps then brought him to her. She with neck outstretched, would take the branch from his beak, and if approved of would forthwith place it in



NEST OF *Lepterodius asha* DEPICTING LEAFY TYPE
WITH LEAVES STILL FAIRLY FRESH



THE SAME, SHOWING LEAF CURTAIN GRADUALLY
FALLING OFF OWING TO LEAVES WITHERING
AND DROPPING